# Resolution on the deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97

2018/2861(RSP) - 04/10/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, and Greens/EFA groups.

Noting that the situation in terms of freedom of media and freedom of speech is **continuing to deteriorate** in Belarus, Members strongly condemned the repeated harassment and detention of journalists and independent media in that country. It considered the blocking of the news website Charter 97 by the Belarusian authorities since January 2018 to be unacceptable, and urged the Belarusian authorities to **unconditionally lift the block** imposed on internet access to the news website within Belarus. Charter 97 is a news website which focuses on human rights and opposition causes, and was blocked for an indefinite duration, without trial and amid vague allegations of 'threats to the national interest'. Parliament called for the EU institutions to include in the **EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities** strong references to the independence of the media, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The European External Action Service (EEAS) and Member States were urged to ensure that **EU assistance programmes and financial assistance** were linked to tangible steps towards democratisation and openness, including comprehensive election reform and full respect for media freedom.

Parliament also condemned the latest **amendments to the Law on Mass Media**, adopted in June 2018, which extend government control to online media outlets and will impose further bureaucratic hurdles for websites wishing to register as official online media outlets. It regretted the fact that Belarus is continuing to persist with a repressive and undemocratic policy against journalists, lawyers, political activists, human rights defenders, and civil society actors, underlining that such repression **hinders any closer relationship with the EU** and broader participation in the Eastern Partnership.

EU institutions were asked to:

- continue their support for **civil society organisations** in Belarus and abroad, and support independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language, and those abroad such as Charter 97 and Belsat TV;
- **closely monitor the situation of media freedom** in Belarus, in cooperation with the Standing United Nations Rapporteur for Belarus.

Lastly, Parliament called for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners Mikhail Zhamchuzhny and Dzmitry Paliyenka, to allow the unhindered functioning of political and public organisations and to repeal Article 193/1 of the Criminal Code curtailing the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.